

# *The Alexander Thomson Society Newsletter*

Nº24, May 1999

## **A building fit for a Scottish Parliament?**



**A**MONG the photographs in Thomson's folder in the Glasgow Museums collection – an exciting discovery for the Thomson exhibition opening at The Lighthouse in June – is a view of the Edinburgh High School, that masterpiece by Thomas Hamilton which Thomson considered one of “unquestionably the two finest buildings in the kingdom.” The print is labelled ‘Glasgow Architectural Society 1860’ and it is presumably the product of the occasion in that year, recorded in Ronald McFadzean's biography, when Thomson and James Howatt accompanied the Glasgow photographer Thomas Annan to Edinburgh and Melrose to take photographs for the society.

**Inside: Hitchcock on Caledonia Road  
and a Thomson Family Tree**

# Henry-Russell Hitchcock and the Caledonia Road Church

**T**HE great American architectural historian, Henry-Russell Hitchcock (1903-87) was a particular and consistent advocate for the architecture of 'Greek' Thomson. It was he who wrote that Thomson designed "three of the finest Romantic Classical churches in the world" and who described Moray Place as, quite simply, "the finest of all Grecian terraces." Hitchcock's interest in the Glasgow architect seems to have begun in the 1930s when he commissioned T. & R. Annan to take photographs of a number of his buildings, including the precious shot of the remarkable interior of the Queen's Park Church looking from the minister's rostrum towards the entrance and gallery. In 1950, Hitchcock helped Graham Law with his dissertation on Thomson, published in the *Architectural Review* in 1954, and his own high opinion of Thomson was given in his *Early Victorian Architecture* of 1954 and the subsequent *Pelican History of Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*.

What is less well known is the role Hitchcock played in saving what remained of the Caledonia Road Church after the arson of 1965. Following that self-induced disaster, Glasgow Corporation was minded to sweep away the ruins. What dissuaded them seems to have been a letter from the American historian published in the *Glasgow Herald* in 1966. David Walker recalls that Hitchcock had probably been tipped off about what was going on by Andrew MacLaren Young. Whether or not shamed by this intervention from a distinguished outsider, the Glasgow authorities changed their minds and accepted money from



*Caledonia Road after the 1965 fire, but before the demolition of the adjacent tenements.*

the Ministry of Works merely to stabilise the gutted shell (rather than rebuild and re-roof the shell, which would have been rather more useful). In 1967-68, Sir Frank Mears & Partners, of Edinburgh (who were also commissioned to work on the St Vincent Street Church at the same time) took down damaged stonework and repaired what was left with cement – thereby hastening the decay of the sandstone. And the contiguous tenements by Thomson in Cathcart Road and Hospital Street were still demolished, in 1972-73, leaving the

remains of the church as a meaningless, forlorn and isolated ruin. But at least something was allowed to stand.

We now print the full text of Hitchcock's letter. It is a remarkable document, not least because he was prepared to make a balanced assessment of the contributions of Glasgow's two most celebrated architects. In 1966, however, Mackintosh mania had yet to emerge, let alone get out of control, and several of Mackintosh's buildings would themselves soon be threatened with destruction by the

Corporation.

In 1962, unable to maintain the fabric, the congregation of the Caledonia Road Church had been dissolved. The Church of Scotland then sold the building for £3,700 to the Corporation of Glasgow, which permitted it to be vandalised and the lead stripped from the roof. In 1964, councillor Richard McCutcheon, the planning convener, announced that the Corporation must decide between the St Vincent Street and the Caledonia Road Churches as "the time may come when we may have to consider putting up a plaque instead of retaining certain buildings." Yet this was said when the annual conference of the Royal Institute of British Architects was taking place in the city and delegates were admiring its buildings, so the architect Bill Howell retorted that "if Glasgow did not preserve the two churches, the city would be throwing away buildings of world stature." [*Glasgow Herald*, 8th & 9th May 1964. As for the Caledonia Road Church, "it is in a shocking mess," Francis Worsdall reported to Thomson's granddaughter, Mrs Stewart, on 2nd August 1965. "Vandals and a scrap merchant had broken in and not a single piece of metal remains. The organ has been wrecked – much to the disgust of an organ-builder friend of mine, for it was a good instrument. The lamps had all gone. I was hoping to have rescued them from the wreck. I did manage to save the urn [i.e., the Garnkirk Urn] which stood in a niche on the gallery staircase. It had been smashed into about 50 pieces..."

On October 30th, 1965, to nobody's surprise, the church was

set on fire. J.M. Reid immediately protested that "the state of civilisation which allows a city's most admirable architectural possession to suffer in this way is not very high... Peace-time Glasgow now has a record equal to that of the German airmen who destroyed Thomson's Queen's Park Church during the war." [*Glasgow Herald*, 1st November 1965] But the

Corporation swiftly proposed the demolition of the gutted shell. What seems to have saved the remains of Thomson's first great Presbyterian temple was this magisterial letter in the *Glasgow Herald* for 4th March, 1966, from Hitchcock, writing from Massachusetts as the former president of the Society of Architectural Historians.

## Egyptian Halls Visit



**Members of the Society may have often seen it as they passed down Union Street, but how many people have been inside Thomson's Egyptian Halls warehouse?**

**Now, courtesy of the Morrison Partnership, architects, and Peter Stephen & Partners, engineers, The Alexander Thomson Society is happy to offer members a chance to see inside Egyptian Halls.**

**Please meet outside the building on Union Street on TUESDAY, 6TH JULY at 6.00pm.**



## 'Architectural Masterpiece

March 1, 1966

Sir, – Glasgow in the last 150 years has had two of the greatest architects of the western world. C.R. Mackintosh was not highly productive, but his influence in central Europe around 1900 was of an order comparable to such American architects as Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright.

An even greater and happily more productive architect, though one whose influence can only be occasionally traced in America in Milwaukee and in New York and not at all as far as I know in Europe, was Alexander Thomson. What was perhaps his most extraordinary work, the Queen's Park Church, went in the war but two others of his churches have, up until now, fortunately survived. The St Vincent Street Church is the better known of the two, but the Caledonia Road Church is the finer. Except possibly for certain English Victorian Gothic churches by Butterfield and his contemporaries it is without question the most remarkable and the most distinguished ecclesiastical edifice of the high Victorian decades before the star of H.H. Richardson rose in America in the 1870s. It is hard to believe that the city of Glasgow is unable to find ways of preserving and re-using such a major document, despite the bad record of London in allowing the destruction of such an equally major Victorian monument as the Coal Exchange.

The eyes of the outside world have been focussed on Scotland in the last few years because of the

distinction of the new town of Cumbernauld and the rebuilding of the Gorbals. Valid as these programs are as achievements of our own period, it would be tragic if Glasgow were to lose the work of the architects of the near past such as Thomson and Mackintosh whose international rating by historians such as myself has long been of the highest.

Assurance we must have that our own architecture of the third quarter of this century has validity, but assurance we already have that the architecture of 'Greek' Thomson in his day was unequalled elsewhere in Europe or in America. At the top of the list of his surviving work stands the Caledonia Road Church. In thus writing I believe I speak not alone for myself but for all those in America who, longer than elsewhere, have focussed our attention on the great works of

the nineteenth century. We have in America our own problems of preservation, but rarely are we asked to support the preservation of individual monuments of the distinction of this masterpiece of Thomson's

H.R. HITCHCOCK  
Former President Society of  
Architectural Historians  
111 South Street  
Northampton  
Massachusetts, U.S.A."

[The remarkable Coal Exchange by J.B. Bunning had been demolished in 1962 by the Corporation of London. "Milwaukee" was a reference to the Layton Art Gallery in that city, designed in 1885 by the enigmatic Audsley Brothers - William James and George Ashdown - whose Bowling Green Offices in New York were also strongly Thomsonian in style - see *Newsletter* N°3 for January 1992.]

## Caledonia Road Church accounts

**V**ERY FEW documents concerning the construction of Thomson's buildings seem to survive, so it is exciting that Roger Guthrie has discovered in the Glasgow City Archives the architect's final account for designing and building the Caledonia Road Church. This we now reproduce. The document is signed by Thomson on behalf of Baird and Thomson, for the partnership with John Baird II had been dissolved while the church was under construction.

This document is important as it reveals that Thomson designed the building a year before the date usually cited, that is, before the Revd Robert T. Jeffry was invited to be the minister of the United Presbyterian congregation formed in December 1854. This would seem to mean that the preliminary designs for the church preserved in the Mitchell Library date from 1855. The church was opened on 22nd March, 1857.

According to J. Logan Aikman's *Historical Notices of the United Presbyterian Congregations in Glasgow* published in 1875, the Caledonia Road Church cost about £8,000. Assuming that no earlier payments had been made, Baird & Thomson's charge of £232 would seem to represent an architects' fee of 3.5%.

Messrs the Committee of Management  
of Caledonia Road Church

To Baird & Thomson

Pro Alexander Thomson, Architect

1855 For making various designs for proposed  
Church - Working plans of do. with  
Copies for tradesmen, Large scale  
drawings of portions and drawings of  
details to full size, - Instructing Measurer  
and procuring Estimates, - Visiting Building  
to during progress, - Instructing tradesmen, -  
1858 Meetings and Consultations, - Orders for  
— instalments, -Examining accounts &c. &c. £232.0.0.

Glasgow 28th April 1858  
Recd- payment pro Baird & Thomson  
A. Thomson

Glasgow March 1858

## Thomson Exhibition

After two postponements necessitated by delays in the work of converting the old Glasgow Herald building into Glasgow's Lighthouse, the Thomson Exhibition is now scheduled to open on June 25th. Entitled *Alexander Thomson: The Unknown [sic] Genius*, the exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated book published by Calmann & King with new photographs by Phil Sayer and a text by Gavin Stamp with a comprehensive and referenced list of works.

## Thomson Film

In connection with the exhibition, Murray Grigor has made a fifty minute television film about Thomson called *Nineveh* on the Clyde which will receive its premiere on Saturday, 29th May, at the Glasgow Film Theatre at the end of the Convention of the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland. The film will be

broadcast on the BBC's Ex-S slot some time in June.

## Cases Caledonia Road Church

A competition has been announced for proposals to redevelop the land behind the ruin of the church as a means of securing the future of Thomson's building.

## Egyptian Halls

The work of stripping out later partitions in the interior of Egyptian Halls, carried out by Peter Stephen & Partners, engineers, and the Morrison Partnership, architects, has now been completed, leaving the floors of the building clear and the elegance of Thomson's iron columns evident. The next phase in the work has not yet been confirmed and will depend on a suitable end use for the building being chosen. Meanwhile, the

threat of litigation over the ownership of Egyptian Halls has still not been averted. We remain baffled by this.

## The St Vincent Street Church

The paint which covers the plate glass panels between the narthex and the back of the church has now been removed, revealing that the glass is original and confirming Thomson's ingenuity in getting light into his interiors. What remains incomprehensible is why anyone should have been so stupid as to paint over internal windows.

## West Regent Street / Wellington Street

We have been concerned with the building on the corner of West Regent Street and Wellington Street which Thomson altered and enlarged in 1872 and in which he established his office - see *Newsletter* N°6. Earlier, we reluctantly acquiesced in the erection of a replica building on the site, which received planning permission before the foundation of the society. That planning permission and listed building consent was recently renewed, but now a proposal has been made by County Properties for the erection of a new five storey block designed by Cooper Cromar. (The sign outside the building suggests that its replacement will be ready by late 1999: the letting agents, however, accept that nothing is likely to happen until early 2000).

We have objected to this on the grounds that the proposed

*Continued on Page 11*

# Friends indeed: Robert Foote and Charles Hutcheson

**R**ONALD McFADZEAN mentions, in reference to Robert Foote, the man who first saw Alexander Thomson's architectural potential, the name of 'Charles Hutchison', a long-time friend of Foote.

Robert Foote was the son of David Foote, a plasterer living in the Gorbals, whose name first appears in the *Glasgow Directory* for 1803. David Foote's business did well: he later moved to St Ninian Street, Hutcheson-town, then to works premises at 60 Melville Street, with a house next door at N°58. His business descriptions varied as much as his name ('Foote' one year, 'Foot' the next): in the *Glasgow Directory* for 1821, he becomes 'plasterer, architect'; in 1822 – when the firm becomes 'David Foote & Son' – 'plasterers and stucco merchants'. By 1827, Robert had taken over the business, probably on the death of his father, whose name appears in the Gorbals Parish Register of Deaths for 11th October 1826, dying at 60 from what is described as 'asthma', but might well have been any work-related congestion of the lungs. According to McFadzean:

"His father must have been fairly well off because we know that his son was able to travel fairly extensively on the Continent and especially in Italy and Germany where he came in contact with the works of antiquity. It is probable that some of his classical knowledge was gained from the considerable collection of casts of antique mouldings which were kept in his father's plastering business."

Had young Foote undertaken the Grand Tour? If so, McFadzean suggests it was something "almost unheard of among Glasgow archi-

itects at that time", and certainly for a plasterer's son. Perhaps Foote senior had taken the line that if his son was going to do something other than merely follow in his own footsteps, he might as well train for it in proper fashion.

Robert's architectural leanings were soon made manifest: by May 1828, six months after his father's death, when the 1828 *Glasgow Directory* appeared, he was 'Robert Foote, architect, plasterer, etc'. A year later, and the plasterer's yard in Melville Street had been replaced by new premises in 58 Gordon Street. It was at Gordon Street that Robert's mother seems to have died, on 18th May 1830, aged 66, the year Robert began calling himself simply 'architect'.

By the following year, Robert had moved office again, to 205 Buchanan Street, perhaps while renovation or rebuilding work was being carried out, because he was back in Gordon Street, now at N°50, twelve months after that, by May 1832. From now until his early retirement four years later – he suffered from a spinal complaint, according to McFadzean – his office address was always 46 or 50 Gordon Street (this may not mean that he actually moved offices: street renumbering was a regular occurrence as Glasgow's townscape expanded, developing on greenfield sites, or replacing single or two-storey 18th Century buildings with new tenements and offices). He may in fact have redeveloped his own site:

"Beyond Nile Street, Mr Angus Turner long resided in a house [at 48 Gordon Street] built by Mr Foote"

appears in the *Glasgow Herald* in 1829.

Robert Foote also had other interests: he was Secretary of the West of Scotland Second Exhibition of the Fine Arts at the Gallery, Argyle Street (a small public hall at the entrance to the Argyle Arcade later incorporated into shops), which opened in August 1829. The event was for

"the exhibition and sale of the works of living British artists. Open from 9am till dusk. Season tickets, 15s; single admission, 1s."

Foote might enjoy classical architecture: he was not, however, above involving himself in contemporary art.

Robert Foote had spotted Alexander Thomson's drawing talents by 1834, when Alexander joined Foote's business, just as his master was creating the one building in Glasgow we know to have been designed by him, what is now 82-90 Buchanan Street (right), subsequently given an additional storey. According to the *Memoir of George Thomson* (Alexander's younger brother and architectural partner), written some fifty years later by J.E.H. Thomson (son of Alexander's older brother, Ebenezer):

"Mr. Foote was one of those rare men to whom architecture is a profession, and not a mere business.... the enthusiastic master soon had an equally enthusiastic and apt pupil."

When Robert Foote retired prematurely in 1836, Alexander's apprenticeship was transferred to the office of John Baird I. For all the little we know about Foote's architectural abilities, notwithstanding his architectural 'enthusiasm', he placed young Alexander in good hands: John Baird, in McFadzean's phrase, was



Robert Foote's only confirmed building (now altered), in Buchanan Street

"one of the leading Glasgow architects at the time."

Charles Hutcheson was probably around the same age as Robert Foote: Charles was born around 1795, while Robert may have been born any time between 1786 and 1808. Perhaps they went to school together; McFadzean suggests they may have travelled abroad together, and that they certainly shared an interest in classical architecture. (As far as the *Glasgow Directory* is concerned, they also shared a tendency to variable orthography: 'Hutcheson', 'Hutchison' and 'Hutchinson' all make their appearances down the years, although they all seem to relate to the same person and company.)

Charles seems to have been the son of Robert Hutcheson, born in Leith around 1775. Charles' grandfather (probably another Charles) had presumably moved to Glasgow after the birth of his son and set up in business, since Smith, Hutcheson & Co, wholesale linen dealers, with a warehouse in

'Buchanan's Closs', Trongate, was trading by 1789. Who partner Smith was is not known: perhaps the partnership broke up temporarily; in the *Glasgow Directory* for 1790 the firm becomes simply 'Charles Hutcheson'. By 1803, Smith & Hutcheson were back in business, at 177 Trongate, while a Stewart Smith is listed as an 'Irish merchant' living in lodgings at '8, George's Square'. Charles Hutcheson senior, by now, was living at Frederick Street.

Stewart Smith himself might have been the son of the earlier Smith partner, or simply someone with a coincident name and access to the markets or manufacturers of Ireland: between 1804 and 1807, if he is indeed our earlier Irish merchant, he is listed as being a merchant at Smith & Hutcheson, but disappears by 1809.

Smith, Hutcheson & Co. remained at Trongate for several more years: it is only in 1825 that the firm moved to 27 Miller Street, and the following year to 74 Miller Street. Charles Hutcheson grand-

père remained at 6 South Frederick Street; Charles' father Robert seems to have worked largely behind the scenes while his son toured Europe. By 1828, however, South Frederick Street had given way to the more prestigious address of 3 Carlton Place: was Peter Nicholson's restrained classical architecture an added attraction to a man who had recently married, and with his first child on the way? Perhaps young Charles was now involving himself in the business: whatever had happened, this was to be young Charles' home for the next quarter century.

Charles' father Robert, meanwhile, had his own interests: his name appears as a signatory to a petition in March 1831 to the Glasgow Lord Provost to have the city bells rung to celebrate the successful second reading of the Reform Bill through the Commons, passed one vote,

"the very same majority which placed William the Third on the

*Continued on Page 10*



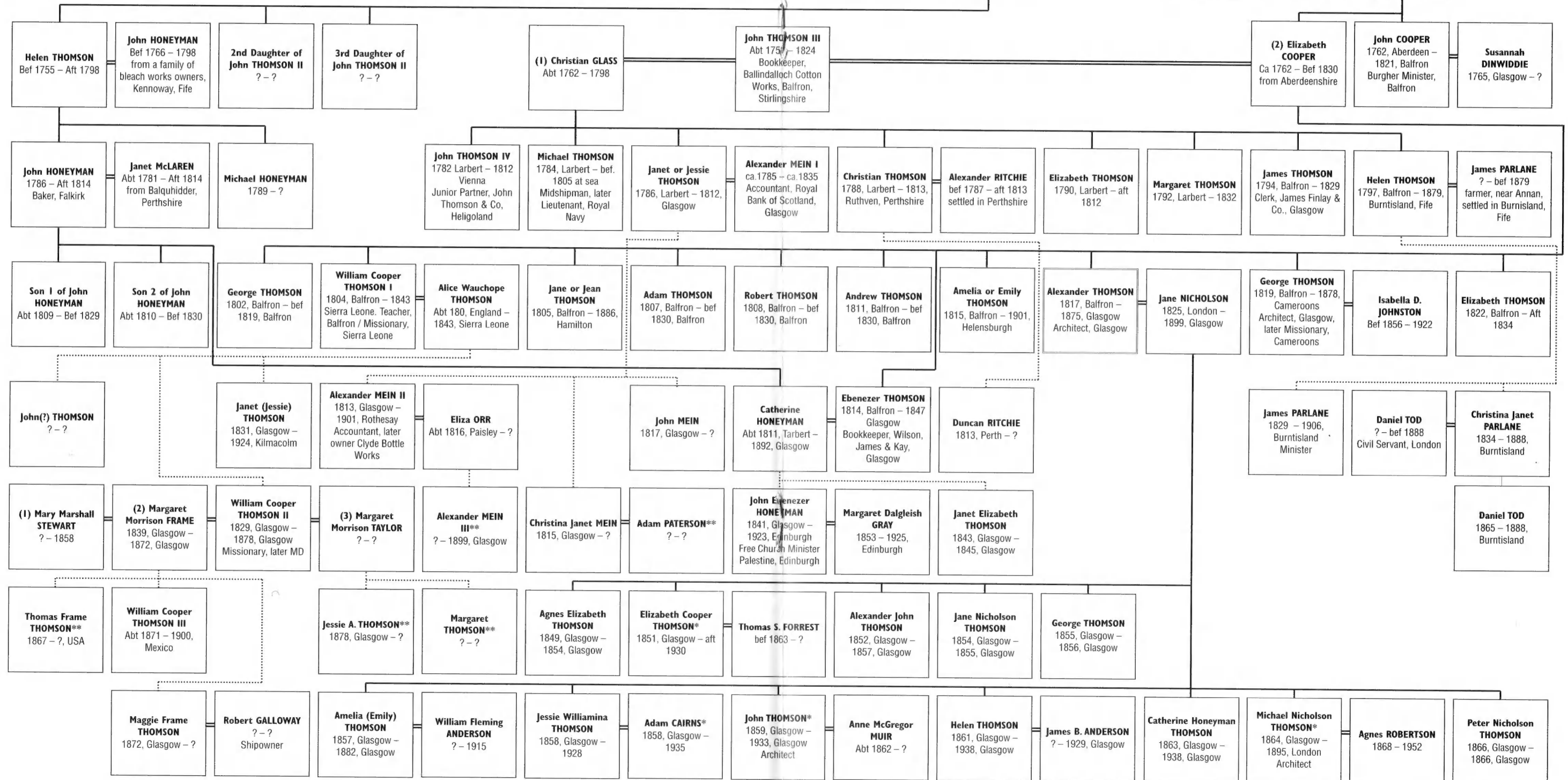
# A Thomson Family Tree

From John Thomson I to Alexander and his children

OVER succeeding issues of the *Newsletter*, we hope to be able to expand our knowledge of Thomson, his forebears, his relatives and his own family. Our knowledge – necessarily sketchy in the early years of the 18th Century until the arrival of regularly kept parish records, will fill out as more research – much of which has

already been undertaken – continues.

To fill out the basic information shown here, we hope to be able to provide thumbnail sketches of the often fascinating careers of Thomson's family and relations, the social, religious and political world in which they moved, how it impacted upon them, and they upon it.



\* Denotes known surviving descendants \*\* Denotes possible descendants

Throne, [having] given William the Fourth another claim to the gratitude of his people".<sup>2</sup>

A 'James Hutcheson' also appears in the same petition, and, in the celebratory illuminations which appeared the following week in offices and houses, James's were described as "magnificent".<sup>3</sup> Other signatories to the petition included James Oswald (later an MP for Glasgow, the industrialist Charles Tennant, and James Lumsden (seven years later a Glasgow Bailie and co-founder of the Clydesdale Bank).

Either young Charles was no great shakes at the merchanting business, or perhaps he just wanted to trade privately, or had made enough money for the moment to indulge his interests. Whatever the reason, within a year of moving into Carlton Place, Charles had closed the company. He continued to describe himself, however, as a 'merchant' in the *Glasgow Directory*. Soon, boredom, or perhaps financial or domestic pressure forced him to open up again: he was now the father of five children (another would follow). By May 1837 Charles was back in business, at 80 Buchanan Street, just as Robert Foote was giving up his practice (Foote's name still appears in the 1837 *Directory*, which was usually published at the end of May each year, and therefore might normally have been set in type some time before).

Robert Foote, for all his infirmity, perhaps hoped to be back at work quite soon, but by 1839 Charles Hutcheson & Co., merchants, had moved – to 50 Gordon Street. Did Charles rent his friend's offices to relieve him of a temporary financial difficulty, or did Robert offer him a cut-price

deal for offices he might no longer need but still held on lease?

Charles' business was needed to support his household: in the 1841 Census it comprised himself, his wife Margaret, three children – all daughters – and two servants. Yet he seemed to be doing well enough: in 1839, perhaps in imitation of Bailie Lumsden and his colleagues, he was involved in a proposal to launch a bank of his own. The bank was planned, according to the *Reminiscences* of Glasgow lawyer Peter Mackenzie:

"in two small apartments at the head of Miller Street (western side) by Messrs. Andrew Tennant, Andrew Rankin, Charles Hutcheson, and others, and some of its notes were actually printed, but Sir Robert Peel put his heel upon them by his Bank Restriction Act, and none of them were issued. This was to have been called the North British Bank, the throes of which are still perceptible in this city."<sup>4</sup>

By 1842, Robert Foote was attempting to return to professional work: letters could be left for him at 110 Fife Place – the address of Allan and Donald Cuthbertson, accountants (it later became 110 West George Street) – or sent by post to 'Peel, Busby'. Work seems to have come in: Robert felt the need to be nearer the city, and by May 1845 he had moved into 123 Hill Street, Garnethill. The following year, Charles had vacated what was now 46 Gordon Street and Robert had re-opened his office there, but only for a short while: by May 1847 he had given up once more. Foote now retired to Helensburgh, where he died seven years later, in 1854.

Charles continued to live at Carlton Place, with his father a few

doors away at N°20; by 1851 Charles' mother had died, and two of Charles' younger sisters, both unmarried and living with their father, had begun offering private tuition from home. With his children growing up, Charles – in the 1851 Census describing himself, perhaps somewhat vaingloriously, as a 'banker' – moved to a smaller home at 270 [West] Bath Street. Ten years later, by 1861, six years after the death of his long-time friend Robert Foote, all trace of Charles Hutcheson, Grand Tourer, sometime merchant and banker, and even of the 'Misses Hutcheson, teachers', disappears from the record.

## Notes

1. R. McFadzean, *The Life and Works of Alexander Thomson*, Routledge, 1979.
2. Peter Mackenzie, *Old Reminiscences of Glasgow and the West of Scotland*, Glasgow, 1890.
3. *ibid.*
4. *ibid.*



Continued from Page 6

replacement building is too large in scale and of poor design. However, we recognise that the replica alternative was flawed as a concept and that the poor condition of the existing, compromise structure makes an argument for its complete restoration difficult. What we would like to see, however, is the preservation of the elegant West Regent Street facade, which Thomson cleverly heightened and to which he added a fine new doorcase. We maintain that a good architect could design an appropriate new building running along Wellington Street while retaining the front facade – rather as Thomson did. And it would be sad to lose Thomson's new Wellington Street entrance as its austere form was derived from

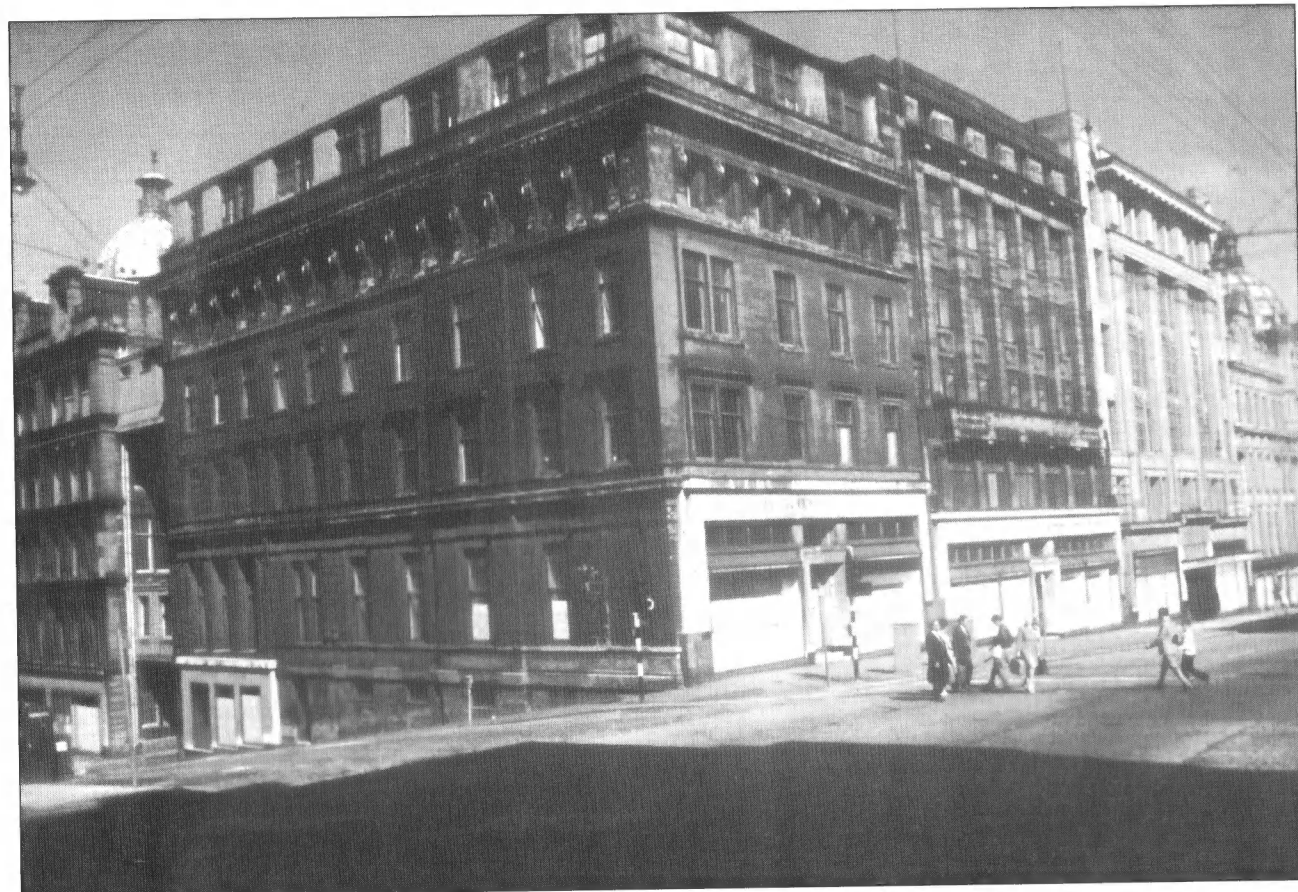
Schinkel's Charlottenhof at Potsdam. The Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland has objected to the replacement design and we await developments.

## The Alexandra Hotel

We reproduce above and on the next page photographs of the demolished Alexandra Hotel on the corner of Bath Street and West Campbell Street taken from some of the colour slides which survived the fire in Frank Worsdalls house five years ago and now in the care of Glasgow City Archives. The hotel was an adaptation and enlargement of existing buildings carried out in 1875-77 by A. & G. Thomson & Turnbull for Robert Aikenhead. It was

demolished in 1973. Roger Guthrie recalls that the console brackets on the attic storey as well as the facing panels on the ground floor were of pre-cast concrete. The general view shows the building shortly before demolition and after the addition of another storey and the alteration of the Bath Street shop-front for Pettigrew & Stephens by Keppie & Henderson in c.1922. The unidentified group photograph shows the original hotel entrance on Bath Street. *The Builder* for 6th October 1877 recorded that, "The coffee-room is placed at the end of the hall, the extremity of the room near Bath-street being a sort of continuous window, in front of which runs a balcony supporting evergreen plants."





## Award for Society Chairman

**T**HE Chairman of The Alexander Thomson Society, Dr Gavin Stamp, was among nine recipients of awards at the 1998 Lord Provost's Awards, held in Glasgow earlier this year.

The Lord Provost's Awards are a civic honour introduced in 1987 to recognise the achievements of persons who have improved the well-being, the standing or quality of life in Glasgow. Gavin Stamp, described as a "highly respected historian and writer whose work, especially in championing the cause of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson, has done much to enhance Glasgow's reputation as a city of excellent Victorian archi-

tecture" received his award – comprising a certificate and medal – from Lord Provost Pat Lally.

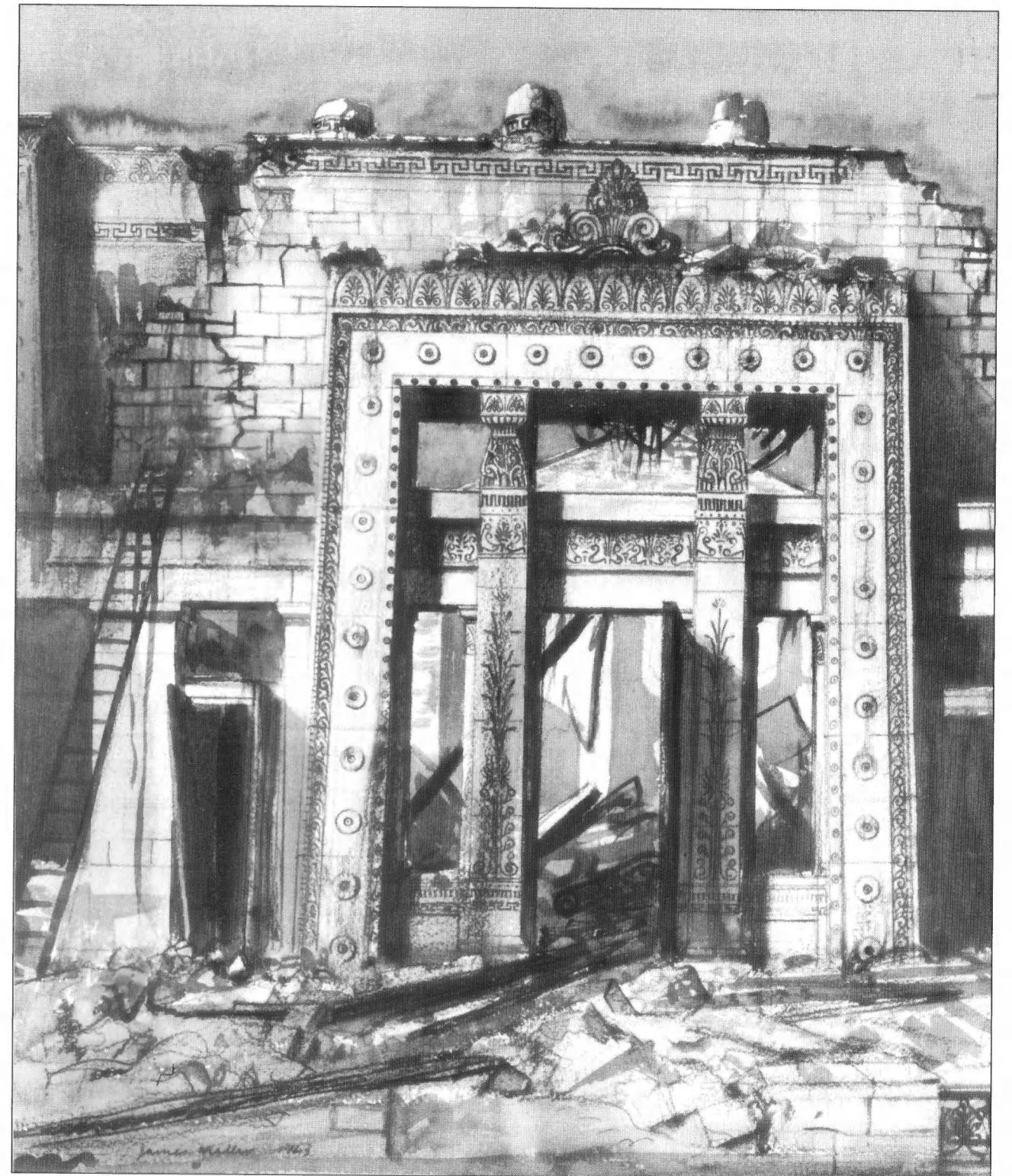
Lord Provost Lally said, "The recipients of these awards come from all walks of life and have made their outstanding contributions to Glasgow in a variety of ways.

"Although not all of them were born here, nor indeed do they all live or work in the city, they each have one thing in common – all have made a huge difference to the quality of life in Glasgow and I'm delighted that we have this opportunity to publicly thank them."

## Visit to Thomson Exhibition

The Society is planning to host a members' evening at the Glasgow 1999 exhibition *Alexander Thomson: The Unknown Genius*, to allow members a private opportunity to see the wealth of material on display.

Planning for this event has been hampered by delays in opening the venue. It is hoped that an evening in early July – possibly Monday 5th or Tuesday 6th – will be suitable. A mailing with details will be sent as soon as arrangements have been finalised.



## Queen's Park Church

Another discovery, this time in the store at Kelvingrove, is a fine watercolour drawing of the front of the Queen's Park Church in ruins, following its total destruction by incendiary bombs during the night of 23rd-24th March 1943. It was painted by James Miller, an official War Artist, and is a much better record than any surviving photographs of the state of Thomson's masterpiece after the tragedy.



By DOMINIC D'ANGELO

# The first John Baird: architect and mentor

**W**HEN Robert Foote could no longer keep his architectural practice going as a result of ill-health, he transferred Alexander Thomson's assistantship to a near-neighbour, the architect John Baird I.

Born in Dalmuir, Dunbartonshire in 1798, John Baird joined the architectural practice of John Shepherd & Co at 21 Glassford Street sometime in 1813. Fifteen might not be an early age at which to start an assistantship, but Baird's new master was not that much older: John Shepherd, born around 1791, was himself only 22 years of age, and Baird seems to have joined the practice at its inauguration. This may be explained by the claim that Baird and Shepherd were related, although precise information on this has yet to surface.

Of John Baird's progress we know little, save that within five years he felt himself competent to practice on his own account: he had to be, for John Shepherd died on 21st May 1818 and Baird, barely 20, and not yet out of his apprenticeship, immediately took over his master's office.

## SUCCESSOR TO THE LATE MR. JOHN SHEPHERD, ARCHITECT.

John Baird, who was for upwards of five years, Assistant to the late Mr. Shepherd, begs respectfully to intimate to the Public in general, and to the employers of the late Mr. S. in particular, that he has commenced business on his own account, and hopes, by unremitting attention to the duties of his profession to merit a share of the public favour.

J.B. would avail himself of the present opportunity of returning his grateful acknowledgements to such of the employers of the late Mr. S. as have already honoured him with their patronage, and he would only say, that it shall be his anxious wish to show that their confidence has not been misplaced.

636, ARGYLL STREET  
4th June, 1818

Shepherd was buried in Govan burial ground four days later. The entry for him in the Govan Parish Registers describes him as aged 27 years, and with the cause of death given as 'Decline'.

The advertisement below was placed by John Baird in the *Glasgow Herald* of 8th June 1818, and Baird must have set to work immediately:

"By hard work [he] built up a practice second only to that of David Hamilton. Refusing to take part in public competitions, he acquired a reputation for shrewdness and probity which in later life earned him many commissions as a valuer of property and as an arbitrator in building disputes."

That is a later appreciation of Baird's work, but for the first three years in independent practice we know little of what he designed. By 1821, possibly later, but still based at '636 Argyll Street', he had his first significant building commission: Greyfriars UP Church, Albion Street, a Roman Doric design for a substantial congregation: 1500 seated in the area and in a gallery around three sides, according to Frank Worsdall's later assessment

(The church was demolished in 1968 and the site remains vacant).

By 1825 he was one of a small number of architects listed as belonging to The Lodge of Glasgow St John, now from an office at 22 Argyll Street, and it was only a few doors away, at 98-102 Argyll Street that, in 1827-28 he created The Argyll Arcade with its iron hammer-beam roof (the buildings which now mark its Argyll Street and Buchanan Street entrances are later). More commercial work followed two years later, with the creation of the Wellington Arcade in Sauchiehall Street (given a new entrance in 1861, and subsequently demolished).

Domestic work becomes evident from 1833, with enlargement work in the Tudor style on Clober House, New Kilpatrick, Dunbartonshire for Alexander Dunlop, followed by additions to Carbeth Guthrie, Stirlingshire in 1835 for William Smith.

Such work was needed: he had taken on a young Alexander Thomson as an assistant in 1836, and some time in 1837 he had married Janet McKean, aged 35 from Bonhill, Dunbartonshire. A year later she gave birth to their first child, Flora.

Now Baird was into his creative stride: by 1838 he and his young family had moved to 5 Buchanan Street, and Baird was being engaged on a wide range of projects: around 1840, he designed Somerset Place in Sauchiehall Street (the end block was rebuilt in 1962); he designed Viewpark House in Uddingston, probably for William Robertson; the castellated style Birkwood House in Lesmahagow for JG McKirdy. Soon followed an array of churches, res-



John Baird's Claremont Terrace, incorporating Claremont House at its heart.

idential properties and large private houses: the Congregational Church, Canmore Street, Dunfermline and Erskine UP (later Brisby Memorial) Church, 45 South Portland Street (the latter now demolished), both in the Gothic style; the Jacobethan Cairnhill House, Airdrie for GM Nisbett; and from 1842, the classical Claremont (now Beresford) House in Woodlands.

In 1841, his second child, Agnes, was born, and Baird continued to work.

Between 1843 and 1847 (the dates may vary), the freestanding Claremont House was engulfed in the more extensive Claremont Terrace; in 1844, the Gothic St Peter's Episcopal Church, Townsend Place, Kirkcaldy. Gothic arose (demolished 1975) and the same year he made extensive additions to Stonebyres House, Lesmahagow for James Monteath (the house was again altered in 1900 and demolished in 1934).

Around 1845, Alexander Thomson became Baird's chief assistant in time for Baird's grand-

est opportunity to date, the 1846 designs for a new Glasgow University at Woodlands, "chiefly in the style of Heriot's Hospital" according to one commentator. It was to be the beginning of an acrimonious and litigious three-year period, not for Baird himself, but for the University. By the end of 1849, the Woodlands scheme was dead, although, according to one commentator,

Baird's layout pre-determined the layout of Sir George Gilbert Scott's later Gilmorehill building.

Even without Glasgow University getting under way, Baird had enough work to enable him to move to 7 Abercromby Place (in West George Street) by 1847.

Woodlands Terrace, Woodlands engaged him between 1849 and 1850, while the Gothic Shamrock Street UP Church (now demolished) also went up. In 1849, however, Alexander Thomson had left to set up in partnership with another John Baird, this time his brother-in-law.

This article concludes in the next *Newsletter*.

## The Newsletter

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## Membership

Membership of the Society costs £10 per year (Ordinary), £15 per year (Joint / Family), £6 per year (Reduced Rate for students, pensioners and unwaged) and £25 per year (Corporate Rate).

## Back Issues

of the *Newsletter* are available, price 50p each plus 2 second class stamps, from the Hon. Secretary at the Society's address.



# Cornerstone Festival

## Architectural Lectures and Church Crawls

**G**LASGOW Churches Together has launched the Cornerstone Festival as a Christian counterpart to Glasgow's Year of Architecture and Design. Among the forty or so events planned in the run up to the Millennium are two series that may be of interest to members of The Alexander Thomson Society.

The first of these is the Cornerstone Lectures Programme, whose forthcoming lectures are as follows:

### Thursday 24 June

Dr. Steve Driscoll, University of Glasgow, in the Ogilvie Centre, St. Aloysius, Rose Street: 'The ancient stones of Glasgow: Archaeology of Glasgow's Christian Origins'

### Thursday 26 August

Rev. Tom Davidson Kelly, Govan Old Parish Church, in the Ogilvie Centre, St. Aloysius, Rose Street: 'Dull and Second Rate?: Peter Macgregor Chalmers'

### Thursday 30 September

Professor Sam McKinsty, University of Paisley, in Hutcheson's Hall, Ingram Street: 'In Search of the Spiritual Toshie: Exploring the Mystical Dimension in Mackintosh's Architecture'

### Thursday 28 October

Dr. Gavin Stamp, Mackintosh School of Architecture, in Adelaide's, Bath Street: 'In the Councils of Eternity: The Architecture of Alexander 'Greek' Thomson'

### Thursday 25 November

Brian Park, Page and Park Architects, in the Ogilvie Centre, St. Aloysius, Rose Street: 'Preserving the Stones'

John Hume OBE, formerly Chief Inspector of Historic Buildings, Scotland, is in the chair.

Admission is free and donations are welcome. Simply come along, or to secure your place, call Adelaide's on 0141 248 4970.

**A**SERIES of Church Crawls, guided tours of groups of Glasgow churches, has also been organised, as follows:

Saturday 5 June and Saturday 14 August, 10.30am to 1.00pm: Battlefield East, Queen's Park Baptist, Cathcart Old Parish Churches (Rendezvous Battlefield E. 5 June, Queen's Park B. 14 August)

Wednesday 8 June, 6 to 8.30pm, Saturday 21 August, 10.45am to 1.15pm: Cardonald Parish, Merrylee Parish, St. Margaret's Episcopal, Newlands (Rendezvous Cardonald Parish). *The Macgregor Chalmers 'Crawl'*.

Tuesday 22 June, Thursday 19 August, Friday 17 September, all from 6.00pm: Adelaide's Baptist Church and St. Aloysius RC Church. (Rendezvous Adelaide's)

Saturday 26 June and Saturday 28 August 10.45am to 1.15pm: New Govan Parish, Govan Old, St. Anthony's and St. Constantine's RC, Govan Salvation Army, St. Kenneth's, Linthouse (Rendezvous New Govan)

Thursday 8 July 6.00pm to 8.00pm and Saturday 18 September 10.00am to 12.00 noon:

St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Lansdowne Parish Church and St. Silas Episcopal (Rendezvous Lansdowne 8 July, St. Mary's C. 18 September)

Saturday 7 August 10.45am to 1.15pm: Shettleston Old Parish Church, Trinity Methodist, St. Paul's RC Church (Rendezvous St. Paul's)

Saturday 4 September 10.45am to 1.15pm: Pollokshields Parish, Sherbrooke St. Gilbert's, St. Albert's RC, St. Ninian's Episcopal Churches (Rendezvous Sherbrooke St. Gilbert's)

Saturday 9 October 10.45am to 1.15pm: Glasgow Evangelical Church, Glasgow Cathedral, St. Mungo's Retreat (Rendezvous Cathedral entrance)

As before, entry is free. There will normally be light refreshments in the last venue in each Crawl.

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